

Road to Justice

By Victoria Liiv

The raiders had come and gone. Again. There was nothing left of the coin Arthur had gathered working at the repair shop all month. Even the piece of bread and a bag of carrots he'd hidden under his cot in the corner of Sunset Lodge's cheapest room were taken. The only thing making the blow a little more bearable was the fact he'd already paid his week's rent. The handful of raisins in his pocket helped to sweeten up the sour mood, if only a little.

When Arthur had filled his stomach with the treats he'd meant to surprise Charlotte with, he went in search of a bigger meal. He had nothing left to trade and wouldn't receive his next payment from the repair shop for six more days. There was only one thing left he could do.

He'd travelled all the way to the coastline and waited an hour for the high tide to recede. Watching the waves splash against the rocks was a perfect distraction. He almost forgot what he was there for. Part of him wished he could stay staring at the blue horizon for eternity.

Down the cliff, past two cave openings - that filled with water every high tide and were of no interest to Arthur - there was an alcove in the rocks only accessible from the beach when the water was at its lowest. Arthur liked to think the alcove used to be an important ritual site. It would have explained the spirits still lingering around the spot even after hundreds of years of trash had piled up and given the place a new purpose. Being completely hidden both from land and the sea, people had started throwing their waste in the alcove. They didn't actually have to climb all the way down to do it. They'd just stand on top and let whatever they'd brought tumble down the cliff's edge and cling-clang its way to the bottom.

Someone's rubbish could become Arthur's treasure. He'd probably not find any riches, but certainly there'd be something he could fix up and sell for a meal. People threw away the most peculiar things.

The climb down had to be taken with utmost care. Arthur was still a bit short for some of the footholds and slipped once or twice during the descent.

"I'm taller than last year," he reminded himself.

Last year, when the raiders had come and Arthur had to find a way to also pay rent for his little room at Sunset Lodge in addition to the food, he'd taken the climb down the cliff with even more difficulty.

"Next year, I'll have no trouble at all."

He hoped to be more prepared next year to not need the excursion. Even though the coast was beautiful and the waves crashing against the rocks had almost magical ability to wash away his worry, he'd rather stay away from the alcove.

It was the spirits lingering around the ever growing pile of dump.

Arthur had yet to see them harm a soul and most of the time they were simply floating around in circles or going on about their routinely activities. He still got the creeps every time.

Nearing the small tunnel entrance to the secluded dumpage, he already felt goosebumps rise up on his arms.

"Don't be silly," he muttered to himself. "How many times have I done this now? Must be at least four. Never have they bothered me or even looked my way. Other than Big Billy, none of them acknowledge my presence at all. Big Billy is nice."

Big Billy was one of the spirits. It wasn't actually his name, but Arthur didn't know his real name. He'd gotten his name due to his bulky size and because he resembled Billy from the butcher's shop. Just a little.

Arthur passed by the first of the spirits just outside the tunnel to the rubbish dump. They didn't usually wander off onto the beach. At least Arthur hadn't seen them do so. But Arthur did not visit the coast all that often. Cold shivers shook him as the spirit looked through him with cold grey eyes.

Big Billy looked up from where he was sitting on top of a mound of litter and nodded a greeting to Arthur after he'd squeezed through to the alcove. Arthur didn't want to be rude, so he nodded back to the ghost. Then he started to sort through the pile right at the entrance doing his very best to ignore all the other spirits lingering around.

Big Billy moved closer to observe his search. Slowly, reluctantly, he moved deeper into the alcove, knowing real well, he'd already found everything of worth from the first piles during his previous visits.

Braving up, he shuffled past a pair of spirits having a heated argument Arthur couldn't hear. They probably didn't hear him either, but he still muttered an "excuse me" when he got too close. One of his hands brushed through one of them. The ghost didn't even blink an eye, but Arthur felt a shizzle of electricity pass through him and he pulled away in a rush, backing into a pile of corroded metal mixed with something rotten behind him. Pieces of metal clanged and shifted at the collision with the boy. Two big carriage wheels slid off the top, almost hitting Arthur as they fell to the narrow pathway between the heaps. All of the balance in the metal rot filled pile suddenly shifted and threatened to collapse on him.

He took off in a run toward the entrance with the metal objects clanging behind him. There had to be another way to find a meal.

An unexpected “psst” stopped Arthur from squeezing out of the alcove altogether when he’d reached the tight entrance. He turned around to see Big Billy pointing at something in the metal pile that had stopped collapsing in on itself. It wasn’t the first time Big Billy had tried to communicate with Arthur, but it surprised him every time.

He turned his eyes in the direction of Big Billy’s finger. Something glinted in a rare ray of sunlight, reaching down to the cavity in the earth. Something that would most certainly buy Arthur a meal and lodging for a whole year! Carefully, Arthur approached the pile of metal once more, making sure not to touch the two spirits that hadn’t moved from their previous spot.

He couldn’t believe his eyes. Right there in the middle of the pile of rubbish a sword was sticking out. One embellished with a golden handle and delicate guard design. Arthur spared a look at eagerly nodding Big Billy, before reaching out to grab the weapon. As soon as he touched the handle he felt a sudden shift in the air. From the corner of his eye he saw the two spirits he’d passed just a moment ago staring right at him and a spike of fear passed through him. Without a second thought he pulled the weapon out of its resting place in a one swift movement and held it up in front of him. It was heavier than he expected and his hands shook with the weight of the metal.

As he looked around the dirty alcove, all of the spirits still lingering around floated closer to him, eyes pouring into his very soul. On quivering feet, he backed toward the alcove entrance doing his best to keep his one of a kind find up as a barrier between him and the suddenly very interested ghosts.

He didn’t reach the entrance before he was completely surrounded. As one, the spirits dropped down to one knee, bowing their heads.

“King Arthur,” Big Billy whispered from his own kneeling position. “With your permission, we’ll pass on into the everlasting grace of the Sun God.”

The boy looked at them in astonishment. “But I am no king. I’m just a mechanic.”

“At your will, we will serve you for eternity,” the spirit whispered back, his voice scratchy and sore from not being used for a long time.

“Serve me? I don’t- I don’t understand.” Arthur wasn’t scared anymore. He was worried and confused and didn’t understand what Big Billy was trying to say to him.

The spirit gave him a sad smile. “It is in your power to release us or bind us for eternity.”

“Then I will release you.” His voice was shaking a little and the words came out in a buff, but as soon as he said them a gust of wind blew through the alcove taking all of the spirits within with it.

With a last smile Big Billy’s whispers blew into the alcove. “You will conquer words and bring justice upon the people of Dantalon, King Arthur.” Then he, too, was gone.

Left alone in the alcove, it suddenly felt even more unwelcoming. He rushed out and back up the cliff, struggling to climb even more with the weight of the sword pulling him down. Back in his room at Sunset Lodge, he decided not to sell the sword.

This was the beginning of resistance. People of Dantalon would be free of the injustice.